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ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of the current status of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) students on community college campuses, and gives an idea of offerings and programs available at some campuses and districts. A primary difficulty in researching this subject is the anonymity of much of the LGBT population. The "coming out" process is a form of self-selection; those who are not "out" are difficult to include in research efforts. Recent studies related to LGBT issues have arisen out of sociology in conjunction with sexuality. Anti-gay sentiment, including violence and harassment, is an area of concern in both community college and university institutions. Many LGBT student victims fail to report crimes of this nature, remaining anonymous and further complicating research on the topic. In addition to changes and growth common in all student development, LGBT students undergo an additional and unique process, sexual or gender identity formation, which has discernible stages. Added challenges result from multiple group membership or rejection of sexual labels. Now available to students is a multitude of information accessible on the Internet, as well as numerous course offerings related to LGBT studies, and an Associate of Arts degree in Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Studies. A case study looks at Coloring Outside the Lines, a 40-member LGBT support group at Salt Lake Community College in Utah. Appended are important new resources, including a practitioner's handbook and Institutional Assessment of Sexual Minority Status Checklist for use by community college administrators. Contains 31 references. (AS)

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Sexual Minorities on Community College Campuses

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Article: Sexual Minorities on Community College Campuses

As part of the ongoing dialogue surrounding multi-culturalism and inclusiveness on community college campuses, some participants are beginning to incorporate the topic of sexual minorities — lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT) students — in the debate. The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the current status of LGBT students on community college campuses. An attempt is also made to give the reader an idea of the extent of offerings and programs available at some campuses and districts. Finally, an appendix listing important new resources is included.

The extent to which this student population exists on community college campuses can only be surmised. Currently, there are no studies that attempt to quantify the size of this population. Perhaps not coincidentally, there are also no data on this topic regarding the number of LGBT college students on four-year campuses either. If, however, in the course of serving the communities of which they are a part, community colleges create programs, student support groups, services, and organizations intended to support these students, then it may be possible to estimate to some extent the presence of these students.

Literature Review

Significant for its absence in the literature is LGBT-related research specific to community colleges, however, a significant number of important publications have begun to address the topic of LGBT college students at four-year institutions. It is important to begin by noting that there are a number of problems that complicate the study of this student population on any campus of higher education. First, as previously mentioned, because there are no data available on the number of LGBT students in American higher education, it is not possible to determine the size or prevalence of the LGBT college student population on either community or four-year college campuses (Siporin, 1999). Current best estimates are grounded in sex and sociological studies dating back more than 50 years (Kinsey, 1948; Institute for Sex Research, 1953).

Second, there is the question all educational researchers must overcome when studying LGBT students: how to identify a population that may not wish to be identified? Any study of sexual minorities must of necessity rely on self-reporting because, by definition, the "coming out" process is a form of self-selection; those who are not "out" are difficult, if not impossible, to include in research efforts. Consequently, any examination of this special population can yield only a partial picture.

The third issue becomes apparent only during the course of the literature review itself. Research regarding LGBT populations on college campuses is being conducted across a large and disparate number of disciplines. Early studies of homosexuals concentrated on their sexual behavior (Kinsey, 1948; Institute for Sex Research, 1953). As researchers began to realize that

gays and lesbians are more complex than simply their choice of sexual partners, more recent studies, many of college students, have arisen out of sociology (Franklin, 1998; Patel, 1995), psychology (Cass, 1979; Franklin, 1998), and education (D'Augelli et al, 1992; Hogan and Rentz, 1996; Lease, 1995; Malaney Williams and Geller, 1997). Work is also being conducted in fields as disparate as the humanities and health sciences (Green, 1998). While much of this research is about LGBT college students, few of these efforts, however, specifically address the community college LGBT population.

It is probable that many of the issues that affect LGBT college students at four-year institutions affect similar students at community colleges as well, possibly, in some cases to a greater degree. One area of study addressed with some frequency is that of anti-gay sentiment toward LGBT students by their fellow students (D'Augelli, 1992; Downey, 1999; Engstrom, 1997; Lease, 1995; Patel, 1995; Reinhardt, 1997; Malaney Williams and Geller, 1997). Because none of these contributions have included data specifically related to community college campuses, it may be reasonably inferred that research in this area needs to be conducted.

An area of greater concern to both researchers and the higher education community in general is anti-gay violence and harassment. For the sake of clarity and brevity, for the purposes of this paper the term anti-gay is intended to include negative sentiments against all sexual minorities. Research in this area is complicated by the fact that many LGBT student victims fail to report crimes of this nature to campus or legal authorities (Downey, 1999). One researcher's response to this problem has been to study the perpetrators of anti-gay violence and harassment

instead of their victims. Findings from the only study to examine anti-gay violence and harassment on community college campuses indicate that the problem is wide spread (Franklin, 1998). An anonymous survey conducted at six Seattle-area community college campuses indicated that twenty-four percent (n=484) of respondents had engaged in verbal harassment of individuals perceived to be gay or lesbian. Another ten percent admitted to committing physical violence or threats of violence against presumed gay men or lesbians. Therefore, more than 1 in 3 community college students in this study engaged in hate speech or hate crimes on the six campuses studied.

Another area of concern common to both community and four-year institutions is student development. It is well documented that, during the course of their education, all college students undergo significant measurable change in factual knowledge, cognitive abilities, values, attitudes, and psychosocial development (Chickering, 1969; Chickering and Reisser, 1993; Greenley and Tinsley, 1988; Kurfiss, 1988; Meiland, ? Year). In addition to these changes, common to all students, LGBT students undergo an additional and unique process, sexual or gender identity formation (Cass, 1979; Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito, 1998). As with the larger group characteristics, a series of discrete steps in the process of identity formation are discernible. Cass's (1979) six-stage Theory of Homosexual Identity Formation serves as the basis for much of the present work in the field. More recent researchers theorize five stages (Sullivan, 1998) while others observe four (Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito, 1998). Regardless of the number of stages posited, it is now common to see students arrive on the

doorsteps of community colleges and four-year institutions already in some stage of this developmental process and seeking the services of Student Affairs professionals (Fassinger, 1998).

There are also added challenges for those students whose identities are complicated by multiple group membership or rejection of sexual labels. Students of color who also happen to be sexual minorities are frequently confronted with the problem of having to identify with one or the other group. In their racial group they may be subject to homophobic reactions, while in their sexual identity group they may have to deal with racism and prejudice (Wall, 1991; Dumas, 1998). There are those students, too, who engage in same-sex behavior but do not identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender — who reject sexual labels altogether, but who nevertheless experience confusion regarding their feelings and behaviors (Green, 1998). As all of these students undergo the sexual identity formation process in a largely hostile environment on both community college and four-year campuses, they may become susceptible to failure-to-persist and other problems, necessitating the establishment of intervention policies (Sullivan, 1998).

LGBT students may also face homophobia and hostility from members of their campus communities other than their peers. Research indicates that neither faculty nor student affairs professionals are immune to anti-gay attitudes (Hogan and Rentz, 1996). What is unclear is the extent to which this is true. A lack of empirical research in this area may attest to the need for additional study of attitudes among faculty and staff on community college campuses.

One issue common to nearly all community college campuses and many four-year institutions is what may be thought of as "commuter campus syndrome," a campus environment wherein students arrive from off campus, take their classes, and then leave. Predictably, most students will fail to establish links with other students, the faculty, or staff. Although Leck's (1998) research on LGBT students is concerned primarily with four-year commuter campuses, many of the problems she identifies could just as easily be used to describe community college students. One condition common to traditionally aged LGBT students on both campuses that forestalls a sense of community or establishment of relationships with LGBT peers is living off campus with parents (Leck, 1998). On community college campuses, this issue is part of the larger problem of a lack of on-campus housing. Working full- or part-time while attending school also adversely affects students' ability to become involved in campus based LGBT activities (Leck, 1998). A lack of institutional support services, as well as inadequate opportunities to interact with other LGBT students, faculty, and staff, also deter sexual minority students on both types of campuses as well (Leck, 1998). Finally, administrative barriers to the formation of LGBT student groups may interfere with these students' abilities to form contacts and friendships (Leck, 1998). Typical of these obstacles is the insistence by some institutions to print the home telephone numbers of LGBT student group leaders in campus publications. For those students who may not be out to parents or roommates, this may be a violation of their privacy. Making this information public may also leave these students vulnerable to anti-gay telephone harassment as well.

Programs, Student Organizations, Support Services

A perusal of the Internet only begins to reveal the scope of the programs available to some LGBT students. Not surprisingly, San Francisco leads the way in community college campus offerings to LGBT students. A search of the City College of San Francisco (CCSF) on-line catalogue (http://cloud.ccsf.cc.ca.us/Catalog/Ethnic/gayscors.html,) reveals close to thirty course offerings is disciplines as far ranging as anthropology, biology, history, music, English, health, sociology, theater and film. Each of the offerings in these disciplines is LGBT specific. Moreover, these are offered apart from the gay and lesbian studies program.

Established at CCSF in 1989, the Department of Gay, Lesbian And Bisexual Studies is unique among community colleges campuses in that it offers the Associate of Arts degree in Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Studies. Further review of the CCSF catalogue reveals that most of the courses offered through this program are, by articulation agreement, transferable to California State University. Moreover, the majority are also transferable to the University of California, Berkeley (http://cloud.ccsf.cc.ca.us/Catalog/Ethnic/gayscors.html).

Jonathan Ned Katz (1999), Director of the Department Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Studies at City College of San Francisco describes the focus of the program this way:

> We have around 18 or so different classes per semester, with enrollment of approximately 450 total. There are no statistics on how many Associate of Arts degrees the Department awards annually as we don't divide them by field or "major." The classes are overwhelmingly in the arts, not social sciences, as we have felt departmentally that the

> really interesting stuff going on in the field [of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Studies] concerns the question of representation. There is queer film (3 classes covering different periods), TV, visual art (2 classes), lit, contemporary media, music, theater. In the social sciences there are classes on AIDS, psychology, history, sociology, lesbian community, gay relationships and lesbian relationships. There's a theory class and an intro to the field [of gay, lesbian, and bisexual studies] class, a labor issues class and an employment skills class. (Personal communication, March 4, 1999)

The Harvey Milk Institute, located in the heart of San Francisco's gay and lesbian neighborhood, The Castro, takes its course offerings directly to those most likely to need or want them. A small sampling from this organization's extensive web site (http://www.gayglobalsf.com/harveymild/harvey2.html, downloaded March 2, 1999) reveals that nearly 100 courses, most of which are typical developmental fare, are available. Included are courses in art, computers, history, language, literature/writing, and photography. Katz (1999) describes the Institute's origins and purpose:

> I also started a spin-off school, now independent, called the Harvey Milk Institute. It's not accredited, but community based and has 106 classes this semester and about 2500 students. It is, in essence, our non-credit division, though run independently of the district to insure a free hand in course offerings. I chair it, but there is an independent Board of Directors and Executive Director.

Some of the Institute's more esoteric offerings, such as courses in erotica, relationships, and queer theory, are similar to those offered at four-year institutions. As with the non-credit and adult education offerings at most community colleges, these classes fulfill a demand specific to the community of which they are a part, in this case the LGBT community.

Student services and support programs at CCSF are another component of the LGBT presence on campus. Two scholarships specific to gay and lesbian students are offered Counseling services for sexual minority students are also available on three of CCSF's campuses and teaching sites during both day and evening hours (http://cloud.ccsf.cc.ca.us/Catalog/Admin/lrnrstus.html, downloaded March 2, 1999). The variety, number, and frequency of hours evidenced by these programs demonstrate a high degree of commitment to the diverse community of which City College of San Fancisco is a part.

Obviously, CCSF is a special case in point. This institution's offerings are not the national norm. A further review of the World Wide Web reveals that while some community college campuses offer some form of support, none extends the number and range of services and resources that CCSF makes available to its LGBT students. A more typical offering is some kind of a student meeting group. A web search conducted on March 1, 1999 reveals the existence of LGBT-centered student groups at campuses as diverse as Massasoit Community College (Massachusetts), the Coon Rapids Campus of Anoka-Ramsey Community College (Iowa), and Community College of Denver (Colorado). Many of California's 109 community colleges also foster LGBT student groups, including Los Angeles Valley College, Pierce,

Cypress, Fullerton, Saddleback, and Orange Coast Colleges. However, when examining LGBT groups on community college campuses via the Internet or by perusing college catalogs what cannot be determined is the number of students they serve or the frequency with which these groups meet. Nor would this information be obtainable through any other forum other than personal attendance of the groups' meetings or contact with someone who does attend these meetings.

Case Study

One LGBT student group's experience may serve to illustrate the need for these types of groups on all community college campuses. Salt Lake Community College (Utah) serves 20,000 students on two campuses, and utilizes four additional off-campus-teaching centers, as well as four satellite facilities. It, too, fosters an LGBT student group, called Coloring Outside the Lines. An interview of that group's faculty advisor, J. Gordon Storrs, was conducted on February 18, 1999 via telephone. In addition to being the senior Master Planner Coordinator for Salt Lake Community College (SLCC), Storrs also regularly teaches public speaking classes.

Coloring Outside the Lines, is composed of 25 members who meet weekly, although the group has an active e-mail listserv of 40 members. Forty percent of the membership is women. Four men and one woman serve as student officers for the group. Eighty percent of the group are members of the Church of Latter Day Saints (Mormon). Consistent with the general state population and the campus population, three members, or twelve percent of the group, are

persons of color, although there are currently no Asian members. Surprisingly, another ten percent of the group is faculty or staff.

Storrs, the faculty advisor for the group, has been married for thirty years and is the father of four adult children, one of whom is a student on the campus where he works and teaches. He recounts how, in May of 1998, when two student members of the group first approached him and asked him to be faculty advisor, his first thought was "What will people think of me? Will they think I'm gay? Although I wanted to be useful and do something meaningful, I had to tell these students that I would have to check with my family first, because they would be affected by my decision as much as me." After securing reluctant consent from his wife, Storrs was surprised by the reaction of one of his children, who told him, "if you become advisor to this group, I won't love you any more."

"I asked myself, if this is what happens when you're just the faculty advisor, what happens to those students who are gay or lesbian?" Storrs set out to discover the answer to that question by overcoming his initial trepidation and accepting the offer to become the group's faculty advisor. Storrs views his decision in terms of equal access. "Everyone," he says, "deserves an equal chance at success on a community college campus. These students deserve, at least as much as everyone else here, the support services that might lead to that success."

Storrs reports that the reaction of colleagues has been a surprise as well. "Many," he says, "have asked, 'how can you do this?'" Others colleagues observe that, for Storrs, "it must

be a tremendous sacrifice." Storr finds himself unable to articulate a specific response to these questions.

"More and more, I have asked myself," he says, "what is the payoff here? What is the payoff in my participation? I have a sense of the answer to that question whenever I attend one of the group's weekly meetings."

"It was following one particular meeting that I fully understood why I participate as the group's faculty advisor." Storrs wasn't at that particular meeting, however, individual conversations with group members who did attend later confirmed what was reported to him afterward.

"At one point during the only meeting that I've missed since I began working with the group'" Storrs recalls, "the subject of suicide came up. Of the twenty members attending that evening, only nineteen were gay or lesbian. However, eighteen revealed that they had attempted suicide at least once. Most explained that they had done so as a consequence of the realization that they were gay or lesbian and knowing how they would be treated by family, friends, and fellow students."

Nor are the faculty and staff that comprise ten percent of the group immune to this phenomenon. "At a different meeting," recollects Storrs, "a fifty-year-old member of the group confided that he, too, had attempted suicide just three years ago. That night, when I got home, I cried. Nobody should have to go through that."

When asked if he thinks the existence of the group on the community college campus has changed the lives of the students, Storrs responds, "I don't know. I've seen some of them become more confident in who they are. Some say, 'I feel more comfortable.' My assumption is that, because they continue to attend, the meetings must be useful to them. I've seen a greater awareness among the members of their potential, too. I see some gays and lesbians who are self-limiting in that they take jobs that don't challenge them. The group helps them to see the potential within themselves."

Storrs is not so circumspect when asked about how he himself has been affected since becoming advisor to the group. "Sometimes I get discouraged because of the problems I see these young people going through. People shouldn't have to suffer as a result of their sexuality."

Inquiry into how the presence of the group has affected the campus also elicits an unexpected response. "Because of the group's success, it has become a recruitment tool for the campus." Storrs says the college administration has been extremely supportive of the group's existence and mission. "I feel that the administration has viewed this program in a very favorable light, and will continue to do so," he says.

Storr's experiences bring to the fore a number of important points. First, being an ally to LGBT people on community college campuses sometimes entails severe repercussions for the ally. In Storr's case, as a result of his insistence on doing the right thing, he has lost the affection of one of his children, at least temporarily. Many of his colleagues and co-workers now view him in a different light. Whether that new light is favorable or not remains to be seen. For many

potential allies, most of whose positions on their own campuses might not be as secure as Storrs's, consenting to be the faculty advisor to such a student group would be simply unthinkable.

A second point is the central importance that support by the institutional administration plays in the success of such groups. While there is no research to suggest that lack of administrative support leads to their failure, common sense dictates that no potential organizer of such groups would wish to undertake their formation or support in the absence of support, or in the presence of hostility, from administrators.

Third, because this program is apparently one of a very few programs available to LGBT students in the Salt Lake City area, it has the potential for attracting students who might otherwise choose to attend classes elsewhere. As such the program has the potential, indeed, already is viewed as a positive marketing tool by the SLCC administration. Because of the existence of this program the community college is able to recruit quality students to fill its programs.

Finally, Storrs's assessment that the group fills an important need if its members continue to attend on a regular basis is also probably correct. The fact that not just students, but LGBT faculty and staff, find that this program fills an unmet need in their lives is consistent with the missions of most community colleges.

What we can learn from existing literature and programs

The most obvious conclusion that can be drawn from existing literature and programs is that more research needs to be undertaken. Given the state of current research in the field, it is not overstating the case to say that we know virtually nothing about LGBT students on community college campuses. What we know about LGBT faculty and staff is even less. In fact, there is so little research regarding LGBT student, faculty and staff on community college campuses that any research in the field will be a contribution. It is reasonable to conclude from the experiences of the members of Coloring Outside the Lines that research may be necessary for more than just support of their success as scholars, it may preserve their safety on campus, and in some instances, even save their lives.

One necessary undertaking is the conducting of anonymous surveys to determine the approximate size and composition of the LGBT student population on community college campuses. This would give planners some idea of what types of course offerings or programming might be necessary or appropriate to the student population. The programming and educational needs of adult learners will obviously be different from that of traditionally aged students. The purpose of the student's presence on campus, i.e., transfer, vocational, or remedial, may likely have bearing on programming and curricular planning as well.

Another potential area of study would be campus climate studies to determine perceptions toward LGBT students, faculty, and staff by other members of the campus community. An integral part of this research would be a determination of the levels of anti-gay harassment and violence, if any, toward LGBT students, faculty, and staff. Doing so would

enable administrators to devise educational interventions to forestall such behaviors. In light of the 1996 Nabozny decision, failure to protect students may soon begin to result in colleges being held legally liable for failure to protect members of the LGBT campus community from anti-gay harassment and violence. Federal jurors in that Wisconsin case found in the plaintiff's favor that school officials intentionally engaged in discrimination against him by failing to protect him from anti-gay harassment and violence. He was awarded $900,000.

Appendix

Two important resources have recently become available to those working with LGBT students at both community colleges and four-year institutions. The most important of these is a practitioner's handbook edited by Sanlo (1998). The first of its kind, this publication gathers together more than forty essays written by researchers and practitioners currently active in the field. They have written on the broadest possible range of topics pertinent to LGBT college students at a variety of institutional types. The handbook includes a glossary, a chapter on useful electronic resources, an extensive list of campus climate reports, a list of national organizations, and a set of legal case citations.

Because any effort at improving campus life for LGBT students must begin with an assessment of the current state of the campus's efforts, Ottenritter (1998) has created an *Institutional Assessment of Sexual Minority Status Checklist* for use by community college administrators. This assessment instrument is general enough to prove useful to administrators at four-year institutions as well. Under the functional domains of education, services, and

procedures and policies, the checklist contains twelve assessment areas by which an institution may judge whether it is meeting its LGBT students' needs.

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